THE WHITE HOUSE;

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A NATIONAL DRAMA,

ILLUSTRATING

WASHINGTON SOCIETY,

THE MANNERS AND CUSTOMS, IN HIGH LIFE, OF

ROYALTY AND REPUBLICANISM.

CHICAGO:
THE CHICAGO LEGAL NEWS PRINT.

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DEDICATION.

To all who hold that American freedom means something more than exemption from imperial power and kingly prerogative; that it comprehends true, genuine Republican freedom, this poem is respectfully dedicated by

THE AUTHOR.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

THE PRESIDENT'S WIFE.

PROLOGUE.

March on, ye potentates of earth,
Ye mighty men of noble birth;
Fall into line, ye kings and sages,
Whose heraldry illumes the pages
Of the long record of the past;
Where we may scan from first to last,
As geologic sages trace,
The foot-prints of the "ruling race."
Enter ye in and take your places,
A mighty throng of upturned faces,
Expectant. Let the curtain rise,
And bring before your wistful eyes
A modest pair, of gentle mien,
No grand display of king and queen,
'Reft of the blaze of glittering gems
That flame and shine in diadems;

And yet, each one is crowned supreme,
For, in each face behold the gleam
Of that immortal god-like plan,
The grand equality of man,
Based on the edict, all divine,
Which through the higher life doth shine;
WHAT UNTO OTHERS YE SHALL BE,
THE SAME SHALL OTHERS BE TO THEE.
Here hold an inquest, and decide,
Who shall be teacher, leader, guide.
And as from step to step you trace
The ancient customs of the race,
Where human progress trails along,
Say, who is right and who is wrong.
Return your verdict. Let it be
For lifting up humanity.
(Let it through every region ring),
Till every man shall be a king,
Who rules himself, and him alone,
Soverign and subject all in one.

THE WHITE HOUSE.

[SCENE.—*Ladies' Reception Room.—Mrs. Hayes, seated.—A visitor is announced.—The Secretary of State enters.—Mrs. Hayes rises, and extends a cordial welcome.*]

THE SECRETARY.

What shall we do with the Russian Bear
When he comes to the White House and takes his chair
At the President's table? Don't you think
The best we can do is to give him a drink?

MRS. HAYES.

Never a drink in this house. Those old ways
Might have been well enough in Belshazzar's days;
But times have changed. In this latter day
A Belshazzar feast is not *au fait;*
The dinner is good—the *cuisine* is ample;
Let this house be a *White* House, and set an example
Which Russians and Frenchmen and all men may follow,
And learn to stand up, and never to wallow.

THE SECRETARY.

Look here, my good lady—the speech you have made
Would do very well in a women's crusade;

But what in the world will these noblemen think
Of the President's dinner with never a drink?
All Europe will stare at us. Every glutton
Will roll up his eyes as big as a button,
And say: What! No wine at a White House levee!
Not a tip, nor a nip to set them aglee?
No, no, I won't have it. Good madam, I'll see
That these Russian cubs do not get on a spree.

MRS. HAYES.

Oh that's not the point. I have no fears of that;
Let me tell you, good Sir, just what I am at.
This House, you observe, is the head of the nation,
And I am its mistress—a very high station.
When White House society opens its mouth

It speaks east and west—it speaks north and south;
It speaks to all Europe; its echoes are hurled
At sovereign and peasant all over the world.
When I speak to the world in this way, do you think
I am going to say: My good Sir, take a drink?
With what mighty woes must humanity grapple
If each modern Eve is to bring out her apple
So luscious and fair, with a gentle reminder
That it's sweet to the taste—*with a Devil behind her?*

THE SECRETARY.

Oh, stay—you mistake me. I never have been
On the mount where the kingdoms of earth might be seen:

The temple's high pinnacle ne'er do I climb :
(I let some one else play that trick every time).
I don't advise others to feed upon stones—
I should always tell Job to look out for his bones.
We know how his boils were piled on thick and thicker.
(Poor Job! how he suffered for want of some liquor.)
No, I am not even the "Son of the Morning;"
When one was once called so, 'twas meant as a warning,
To look out for Babylon's terrible King,
Who "weakened the nations."

MRS. HAYES.

The very same thing—

THE SECRETARY.

Oh no, he was after them, "hammer and tongs."
No Belshazzar orgies of liquor and songs;
With spears and with bludgeons he'd pierce them
with holes—
He never suspected them gifted with souls.

*

MRS. HAYES.

Please, sir, just one question: Did you ever see
One "weaker" than when he had been on a "spree,"
As you please to call it? Though it were better
To view the poor fellow as bound by a fetter:
And as nations are made up of people, I think
That nation is weakest that takes the most drink.

THE SECRETARY.

Don't bother me so. Your keen vivisection

Interferes with my argument—breaks the connection.—

I am no roaring lion, that wanders each hour
All over the world, seeking whom to devour.
That's a figure of speech: it gives an ideal
To the average mind more apparent than real.

MRS. HAYES.

One word, if you please. Does one never feel
When boozy, a slight inclination to "reel"?
If that isn't "real" pray do tell me what
It is that will make of one sober a sot.

THE SECRETARY.

I am not (I continue), an "Angel of Light"
To those who so frequently "go it" at night.

MRS. HAYES.

That is so. If thy light unto darkness is turned,
How great is the darkness thy daylight hath
earned?
If thou on a mountain top standest erect,
All men who behold thee may fairly expect
A brilliant reflection—a radiance bright,
And not that thy glory be shrouded in night.
At the dome of the White House thou standest to
shine—
Not a lucifer match, to be smothered in wine,
The brilliance all banished—the star a mere button,
To gleam on the breast of a prince or a glutton:
Then how it shall brilliantly shine on the path
Of a heaven-bound pilgrim, O! tell not in Gath!

THE SECRETARY.

Good madam, we ne'er shall get through if you tease
Me with womanish questions impromptu like these;
There are matters of stateship that need my attention;
I've no time to spare, but will simply make mention
That Russia takes Turkey whenever she's able;
So please see the cook and have some on the table.

MRS. HAYES.

Oh yes, I'm a woman—but isn't one murky
Whose mind wanders off from his wine to his turkey?
It is somewhat singular, though 'twould not be

If its owner had lately "a man gone to see;"
But you, my good sir, never did such a thing,
And it puzzles me how you should take such a swing.

THE SECRETARY.

My friend, I'm afraid you are talking too free,
You might as well say "when he'd gone on a spree."
I beg you, good lady, don't throw slang at me.

MRS. HAYES.

Oh, slang is a good thing, sometimes, you will see,
For warlike and fierce stood Goliah's proud head
Till young David "slang," when he tumbled down dead;

And since this pet Devil on mischief is bent,
Some sling-slang I think at his head may be sent:
Nay, if White House society don't turn him out
I will get up a crusade and put him to rout.
You tell me you tempt none to climb the world's
mountains;
Pray, sir, have you never looked down on its foun-
tains
Where those who imbibe, with a drop in the eye,
Are somewhat inclined in the end to get "high"?
No steeples you climb a temptation to utter,
But do not these "high" ones at last reach the
gutter?
You never advise men to feed upon stones,
But have you not often beheld foodless ones?

And how came they foodless? Whence came this
sore evil?
Their pennies were stolen by that sneaking Devil:
The "Son of the Morning" does not lend his rays
To make the world bright, and dispel the dark
haze;
No, verily, but the old Satanic liar
Invites men to revel in brimstone and fire.
No lions are prowling about for their prey,
But how many murders occur day by day?
How many look into the murderous muzzle,
And pour out their blood because men learn to
guzzle?
Shall we open a school at the head of the nation,
And proclaim this "American civilization,"

And say to the powers: You may lead—we will follow;

You may teach us to sip—we will learn how to swallow;

We are yet quite too young to set up for ourselves;

We are only bright lads, in our teens and our twelves:

Through our pupilage shall we take lessons like these,

And in weak imitation outvie the Chinese?

If so, then behold the American monkey;

We will give him a name, and his name shall be FLUNKEY!

THE SECRETARY.

Good madam, I'm shocked at the awful creation

Your vivid mind frames from such slight degustation.

A little imbibing is harmless you know;

But what I am after, is chiefly to show—

MRS. HAYES.

That when one sets out he is likely to go

To the end of his railroad, and I must decline

To furnish through-tickets on this fancy line;

I've opened no office for that sort of trade—

To send men below on old Satan's down grade.

Whene'er at my door one applies for a ticket,

I will furnish him one for the Paradise wicket.

THE SECRETARY.

Oh madam, you shock me—then cure me so quick,

If you'll be my doctor, I'd like to be sick.
But how we do wander! Pray let us come back
From these fancy lines, to the old beaten track.
We send an ambassador off to these nations;
Our aim is to keep up our friendly relations:
When to him is extended a free hospitality,
'Tis offered at once to our whole nationality;
And when at a feast he's invited to sip,
Don't you see that Americans all take a nip?

MRS. HAYES.

No, only the men, for I beg you to note,
We are not represented—the women don't vote.

THE SECRETARY.

And are we not told in the Bible so true,
To do unto others as they do to you?

MRS. HAYES.

There is statesmanship for you. Great treaties, no doubt,
Are oftimes so framed, with the chief word left out.

THE SECRETARY.

And when unto us a legation shall come
With never a drink, shall we send them back home,
To herald abroad over Europe's wide shores,
That here they've discovered a nation of boors?

MRS. HAYES.

Look here, my good Sir, let us pause—let us think—
And from duty's imperative claim never shrink.
Let us imitate Him, who, a lost world to save,

Gave up earthly crowns for the cross and the grave.

In the grandest career for the welfare of man,
Let America's freedom-born hosts lead the van.
If nations come to us, we'll teach them the way
Which in time shall bring in the millennial day.
If we go to them, we will tell them the story
Majestic and grand, of the King in his glory—
Of lions and lambs which together lie down,
When the jewel of peace shall bespangle each crown;
Of the viper that plays round the cockatrice-den,
The pet of sweet childhood, a teacher of men!
Behold, then, our mission, so grand, so sublime—
No parallel's found in the annals of time!

Shall we, with our claim to be righteous and just,
Through weak imitation prove false to our trust?
We proclaim to the world that our country is free,
That o'er this broad region, from mountain to sea,
Not a foot of our soil shall be trod by a slave—
In "the land of the free and the home of the brave".

And yet, do you tell me we have not outgrown
The serfdom of Europe, from tropic to zone:
That though we have passed our centennial year,
We are under the paw of the great Russian Bear,
And must do as he bids us, whate'er we may think,
When with Sclavic politeness he says: Take a drink?

THE SECRETARY.

I think—I believe—I should say—I don't see,
Just how I can answer—but yet there must be—
Yes, I have it—a maxim that always comes home:
We must act like the Romans when we are in Rome.

MRS. HAYES.

But how does that help you, sir, out of your muss?
Must not Rome do as we do, when Rome comes to us?

THE SECRETARY.

That query we'll solve by the old paradox,
It turns on the question of who owns the ox.
But, madam, my functions and duties are plain;
By any and all means, I'm bound to maintain

Relations of friendship with all the great powers;
Their action toward us, toward them shall be ours;
Well known are their customs, and I shall insist
That we shall observe them. You must not resist;
We have an example directly in point
Sufficient for curing the looseness of joint
My argument needs; for just now we are told
The crown prince of England—head sheep of the fold—
Presides at a dinner in honor of those
Who give roseate hue to the great British nose,
And confer on imbibers that much treasured boon,
Bestowed by him only who runs the saloon.
When princely example thus tells how the swallow
Swift homeward doth flutter, shall we fail to follow?

When incipient Emperors thus lead the track,
What plebian commoner dare turn his back?

MRS. HAYES.

Well, I'm but a woman. I cannot dictate
The course to be followed in matters of state.
But I shall not be at the White House display,
When princes and statesmen shall hold their *soiree.*
And you, the head waiter, whene'er the guests come
Will answer the bell, and you'll say: Not at home.

THE SECRETARY.

Mrs. Hayes, you surprise me. It never will do
For such an event to transpire without you.
Just think of it, madam. What would the guests
say

If you should be missed from a White House *soiree?*

And I have a conscience. Pray, how then can I,
Who like our young Washington, can't tell a lie,
With boquet abreast, and with mid-parted hair,
And rose-scented 'kerchief, bow low and declare
To guests, on arriving: America's queen
Is sick, or is absent, and cannot be seen?

MRS. HAYES.

A *conscience*, you say! Well, what do you think
My conscience will say on this question of drink?

THE SECRETARY.

Oh, madam, remember—you seem to forget—
Though 'tis not surprising, for you have not yet

Been long in the White House,—in matters of state
Our nice sensibilities oft must abate.
To meet the conditions, a moral-sense plastic
Was long since invented, so soft, so elastic
That what would aforetime have been quite disgusting,
We now have no trouble in nicely adjusting.

MRS. HAYES.

But, sir, when these questions of duty arise
We must look at them squarely, and not shut our eyes
To the fact that we stand here to speak for our nation;
And when we receive this august delegation,

We, like the young hero, with hatchet in hand,
Must act as we'd have every lad in our land:
And as for this matter of conscience—which side
Shall furnish the standard to lead and to guide?
Bear in mind it is *we* that must get up the dinner,
And if we do wrong, why, then *we* are the sinner.
So, if 'twere reversed, and if *they* were the host
To furnish provision of coffee and toast;
If they please to offer us lager and wine,
It is ours, as we choose, to accept or decline.
If this be not recognized true hospitality,
Be it President, prince, whate'er land, nationality,
It is high time it should be; then let us begin
A reform that shall bless all the world. Let us win
The wide world's applause, and, what is far better,

From the manacled hands of the world tear a fetter.
And what is *my* duty, good sir, let me ask,
When Providence lays upon me the great task
Of doing whatever of good to our land
This grand opportunity puts in my hand?
When Ahashuerus sent forth his command,
To slay every Jew to be found in the land,
Who came to the rescue, so noble, so brave,
With her life in her hand, her dear people to save?
A woman! And when in these perilous times,
Each day makes its record of terrible crimes,
May not this be an opportune time to begin
A reform that shall wipe out our national sin?
Who knows but that I, as the scepter I kiss,
Have come to the kingdom for such time as this?

THE SECRETARY.

Your theory, madam, is all very good;
But customs, you know, which for ages have stood
The recognized rule, have till now kept the boot—
If you'll pardon the metaphor—on t'other foot.
That rule, you observe, will demand that the host
Consult the guest's relish for toddy and toast.

MRS. HAYES.

Suppose, then, the guests should be forty or more;
Each guest must be furnished, by tally and score
With what he may fancy. But how then can I,
The measure forecast of demand and supply?
Oh, yes, I perceive an ingenious device,
Which, if I'm not mistaken will work very nice:

We will send to each guest a polite invitation,
Upon it inscribing an interrogation,—
To which he'll respond—it may look rather queer:
Champaign, or Burgundy, or Whiskey, or Beer.

THE SECRETARY:

Oh, madam, you tease me. Come, all things must end,
And so this discussion. I will not defend
A custom that's wrong. I have simply to say
We can only take things as we find them to-day.
We cannot be blamed for the failings of others,
Nor answer for faults of our fathers and mothers.

MRS. HAYES.

Very true, but remember, the call for reform

Was sounded aloud in the late civic storm;
So let us at once, for the good of the nation,
Have a new revolution, or new revelation—
And let us not limit its range. We will start
With a novel departure in ethics and art.
We will find a De Boeuf, who a picture shall paint
That will change the relations of sinner and saint.
It will settle this problem, the source of all evil,
So long controverted: EVE TEMPTING THE DEVIL.

THE SECRETARY.

Thanks, madam! Your genius is simply sublime!
No peer will be found if we search through all time.
The question is settled. The laurel adorning
Fair Liberty's brow shall be yours. Good morning!

MRS. HAYES.

Oh, statesman! you've caught me! Pray may not
a woman
Sometimes let her fancy play? Is she not human?
Once more I have learned the great peril of sin:
He that diggeth a pit is quite sure to fall in.
You *will* not relent? You *will* have your own way?
Well, if it must be so, bring on your *soiree.*
But let me suggest: When on your way home,
Stop at the Interior—tell him to come,
The Patent Commissioner—tell him to bring
That latest invention, a very nice thing,
Around which a world's admiration will cluster,
The Patent Elastic and White House Adjuster,
Which I think can be used to advantage.

THE SECRETARY.

I will—

I think I shall need it—but hush! be still!

[*Curtain falls.*]

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